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In several

CONFERENCES.

By **THOMAS BURNET, D.D.**

CONFERENCE I.

L O N D O N:

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TO THE

READER.

I HAVE nothing to advertise the Reader of, in relation to the following Papers, but only this, That I have not chosen this Dialogue-Way of writing to make the Author I pretend to answer, speak weak and silly Things, that I may the more easily confute him; but only to bring his Argument into a clearer Light: And as I have omitted nothing material, that I know of, to give it its full

To the Reader.

full Force and Strength, so I have set it forth only in his own Words, or what I apprehend to be his own Sense.

And I have endeavoured to treat the Author and his Argument in the same manner as I myself desire to be treated; that is, with due Civility and Respect.

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B. **S**IR, I am glad to see you, and am come to wait on you, to have a little friendly Chat with you, upon the subject matter of our last Conference. For I have some Difficulties, that I can't get over, and am willing to have your further Thoughts about them.

A. When we parted, I thought you was intirely satisfied, of all that had past between us, and how came you by your Difficulties since?

B. Why I have turned over the Subject in my Thoughts more closely, and I have had the Sentiments of several other

ther People, and I am now convinced of several Mistakes, which I too easily received for Truth.

A. I pray, Sir, what are they? I shall be glad to know them; for as I am only searching after Truth, 'twill be a Favour to help me out of any Error, and therefore if you please, we'll resume the Argument, and examine it fairly as it stands in Print, and by this means we shall effectually avoid Confusion, and every Objection will be made in its proper Place.

Let us begin then, Sir, at the first Chapter, and as there were two things you desired my Sentiments of, *viz.* Sincerity and natural Religion; have you any Difficulty about either of these? Do you object against my Notion of Sincerity, that it will render us acceptable to God?

B. If you mean by Sincerity, a hearty Desire to please God, and do his Will, and in Consequence of that, to endeavour, as far as possible, to know his Will, in the use of all proper Means, in order to do it in the best Manner; I make no doubt but that this is accepted by God: For what can any one do more, than this? Will God expect to reap where he has

has not sown, and require more of us, than we are able to perform? He must have a very odd notion of God that can think this. God is a bountiful and gracious Master, a Rewarder of those that diligently seek him; and he who out of a sincere Desire to please him, does what he is able to discover the true Way, and lives according to the Light he has, performs an acceptable Sincerity; for this is the only way to shew, that he loves God truly, and to be intitled to the Love of God, and that Reward which God has prepared for those that love him.

Our Saviour himself says, that in his Father's House are many Mansions, and tho' he has prepar'd a place there, of a more exalted Happiness, no doubt, for those that believe in and obey him, yet I question not but that there are other Mansions for others, who have *Feared God, and wrought Righteousness in every Nation*, according to their best Endeavours, tho' they have not been so happy as to know Christ, and enjoy the same Opportunities and Advantages that we do. I cannot think otherwise of a wise, and good God, who is a common Father of all his Creatures.

A. So far then we are both agreed; I mean no more by Sincerity than this, and nothing can deserve the name, but this.

B. But however you and I agree in this respect, I cannot understand how you can agree with your self in this Notion of our being accepted for our Sincerity. For, according to your Scheme, there is no Room for Sincerity doing us any good; and to talk of being accepted on this Account, is the greatest Inconsistency in the World. This I will make appear before I leave you, but I think it not proper to meddle with it here, as it will fall in more naturally by and by.

A. To let this pass then for the present; is there any thing to be objected against what I have said of the Importance and Sufficiency of natural Religion?

B. I think there is but too much, and I am not a little doubtful of the Insufficiency of your Reasoning upon that Subject. I would willingly think as highly of natural Religion as it deserves, but I am not for laying more stress upon it than it can in Reason bear, and this is what I think you do.

You say that natural and revealed Religion are the same, and differ only in the Manner of being communicated; that is, they are as to the Matter of them both the same thing, tho' revealed in a different manner; the former internally, the latter externally; and however they differ in this Respect, the same unchangeable Will of God is revealed in both.

Now there is a great deal to be objected against this: Tho' it is usual to speak of natural Religion in contradistinction to Revelation, yet I think, as you do, that it may be rank'd under the Head of Revelation, tho' of a natural Kind, as being reveal'd in the Natures, and Relations of things, but I can't call it, as you do, an internal Revelation.

If it were any thing, indeed, implanted in our Natures at the Creation, and therefore natural to all rational Creatures, (as you say sometimes) since it must be implanted in all rational Creatures alike, so it must be equally known to all alike; this is what is meant by innate Ideas,

But I have no Notion of the Possibility of any such Ideas or Notions implanted in an immaterial Nature or Mind; and if there were any such in our Minds from

the Creation, I am sure they are not equally known, and perceived by all People. But not to trouble you with this: In one Word, if you mean (as I conceive you do, though I think you have not justly exprest your self here) that the Religion of Nature is called Natural Religion, as it's founded in the Natures and Relations of things to one another; and if you will call this a Revelation as it may justly enough be called, I think it can't be said to be an internal one; for we call that an Internal Revelation, when something is made known to us from within us; and that an External one, when any thing is made known to us from without us, as by a Person sent from God, or the like.

Now if this be a right Notion of it, it is not very right to call Natural Religion, an Internal Revelation, as it is not a Revelation from within us, but from the Natures and Relations of things without us, which are discovered by the Eye of Reason; and, properly speaking, there is no such thing as an Internal Revelation, but Inspiration; and therefore if Natural Religion must be called a Revelation, let it be called Natural Reve-

Revelation, as it's reveal'd to us by Nature; and let all other be distinguish'd by Extraordinary or Supernatural Revelation; and then, I think, we shall speak more justly and exactly.

A. Was this Observation one of your puzzling Difficulties?

B. No; I had no Difficulty in this respect; but I thought it proper to take notice of this, that we may rightly understand one another, and have no Confusion or Dispute about our Terms: That which I am chiefly concerned about is the thing asserted under these Terms; and I confess I can't at all agree with you, that Natural and Revealed Religion is the same, differing only in the Manner of being revealed; nor do I see the Force of your Arguments for it, which ought to be very plain and convincing, before you venture to assert a thing that (whatever you may intend by it) has a manifest Tendency to subvert all Revelation.

A. You can't think I have any such Design by it, when I expressly declare, that there is sufficient Evidence of a Person sent from God to publish a Revelation— That this Person, by living

up

up to what he taught, has set us a noble Example—— and that as he was highly exalted for so doing, so if we use our best Endeavours, we may expect a suitable Reward. This and every thing else of the same Nature I freely own, which is not inconsistent with the Law of God being the same, whether internally or externally reveal'd.

B. 'Tis very true, you say all this; and supposing a Revelation you allow it all, but then you seem to endeavour to shew, that there can be no such external Revelation; because if the Law of God delivered in Natural and Revealed Religion be the same, it will be inconsistent, that there should be any thing more than Natural Revelation only, and therefore no External Revelation, as you call it.

A. This is an Inference of your own,
B. 'Tis plainly hinted at several times in your Book; but let your Sentiments be what they will, I'll fairly examine your Arguments for it, and I will let you see that you do not offer any Argument, from first to last, but what will naturally lead you to an Extraordinary Revelation. Remember then,

Sir,

Sir, that the Point you assert is, That Natural and Revealed Religion is the same, differing only in the Manner of being communicated ; that is, the Matter of them is the same, though made known to the World in a different Manner ! This is what you are to prove.

A. And can there be any thing more certain than this, when you cannot but know, that they must both necessarily teach the same thing, as they both teach the same unchangeable Will of God ?

B. This is an Argument you lay a great Stress upon, throughout your Book ; but if you do but explain your Terms, and tell us what you mean by the unchangeable Will of God, you'll find there is nothing in it, if you rightly understand it. Do you think that God must always will the same thing ?

A. Yes certainly, as to Religion and Duty, because he always wills us to act according to the unchangeable Natures and Relations of Things.

This is the Rule of all rational Beings, and God cannot be conceived to will us to act otherwise ; and if Revelation be only a Declaration of the Will of

of God to Mankind, the Matter of all Revelation must be the same.

But take my Sentiments more fully as I have express'd them thus*.

" If Religion consists in the Practice
 " of those Duties that result from our
 " Relation we stand in to God and
 " Man, our Religion must be always
 " the same. If God be unchangeable,
 " our Duty to him must be so too; if
 " human Nature continues the same,
 " and Men at all times stand in the
 " same Relation to one another, the
 " Duties which result from that Rela-
 " tion must be always the same: and
 " consequently, our Duty to God and
 " Man must, from the Beginning of the
 " World to the End, be always the
 " same— and can never be changed in
 " the Whole or Part; which demon-
 " strates that no Person, if he comes
 " from God, can teach us any other Re-
 " ligion, or give us any other Precepts,
 " but what are founded on those Rela-
 " tions.

B. This is full and clear, if you put
 in these Words at the End, *so far as*

Mankind continue in all respects the same, as they were made, and the End intended by those Precepts is the same. But as you have worded it, 'tis all very false, and you have a wrong Notion of the Immutability of the Will of God, which I conceive ought to be explained thus: The Will of God is immutably determined to such Operations, and such Operations only, as his infallible Reason directs to be done.

And as he will therefore do nothing, but what he has an infallible Reason for, so he will always act according to the immutable Rule of Reason, the Natures and Relations of Things.

And therefore, where the Natures and Relations of Things and Persons are the same, his Will and Actions will be the same, because the Reason is the same; and where they are different, his Will and Actions will be different, because the Reason is different.

A. Very true: But is not the Nature of Man, as a rational Creature, always the same? and is not his Relation to God and his Fellow-Creatures always the same? and therefore do not his Nature and Relation require always the

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fame Duties from him, and no other? As God cannot make a rational Creature not to be a rational Creature, and those Relations not to be those Relations, so he cannot make those Duties and Obligations necessarily arising from them, not to be Duties and Obligations for ever.

And therefore when God declares his Will to Mankind, he cannot will any thing to be done by a rational Creature, but what was always, and always will be necessary for every rational Creature; nor require any Duties as necessary to any Relation, but what always were, and always will be necessary to it; and therefore all divine Revelations, of what kind foever, however different they may be in the Manner, as to the Matter of them, I say must be the same.

B. There is a great Fallacy in your Argument, for want of a Word or two. I do allow that the Nature of a rational Creature, *as such*, is always the same; and when God gives Rules to rational Creatures, *as such*, they will be always the same, and must be so.

But there is a great Difference between a rational Nature, abstractly consider-

ed, which is always the same, and Mankind, who, tho' endued with that Nature, are not always the same, but are continually changing, in one respect or other, in their personal Natures or Circumstances; and these different Circumstances may be a good Reason for different Dispensations on God's Part, and different Duties on theirs.

We should think it very unfit and unreasonable to expect the same Duties of all Mankind alike, without regard to their Circumstances. More is doubtless to be expected from a Man than a Child, from a Man in Health and Strength, than one sick, or weak.

And we should think it very unjust to treat a perfect and imperfect Creature, an innocent and guilty Person alike, merely because they are rational Creatures. There is then in the Reason of Things, a Difference to be made between them, according as their Circumstances are: And therefore as God is a perfectly reasonable Being, whose Will and Operations are always determin'd by the Nature and Reason of Things, so we must conceive that he will always have an immutable Regard to the different

Circumstances of his Creatures, so as not to expect of us more than our Circumstances will admit of, on the one hand, or to refuse any Dispensation, on the other, that our Circumstances do reasonably and naturally require of him, according to the Nature of them, so far as is consistent with our Nature, as rational Creatures, and the End we were made for.

As the same Natures, the same Circumstances, and same Relations will always require the same Things, and the same Operations, so God will always act in the same Manner, and will the same Thing: But if the Nature, and Circumstances, and Relations of Things be different, he must for the same Reason act always differently, and that too in such a Manner and Proportion as the Nature of that Difference requires, so as that there shall be an exact Relation of Agreement between such Difference, and his Operations. And therefore as Mankind were made perfect at the Creation, had they always continued so, they must always have had the same Rule of Life; and as the Rule and Guide of rational Creatures, considered simply, *as such*, is

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the Natures and Reasons of Things, they would have had no other, and could have needed no other Guide or Rule but this.

But if we consider Mankind as different from what they were at the Creation, and fallen from that Perfection they were made in, so far as they are in different Circumstances, such Circumstances will require different Operations; and according to the Natures and Reasons of Things, as here is a different Nature, so here is a different Reason for such other Methods as the Nature of this Change requires; and tho' as they are rational Creatures they must always be treated as rational Creatures, and therefore must always have the same unchangeable Rule of rational Creatures to walk by, yet as rational Creatures in such and such Circumstances, they may stand in need of different Rules, and several other different Helps suitable to the Nature of those Circumstances; and to supply such Necessity in the different Circumstances of Mankind has been the Reason of all different Revelations.

And as the Reason of all different Revelations is only to afford us such things as the different Circumstances of those

to

to whom they are given, required, to the better Attainment of the End they were made for, as rational Creatures; so the whole Matter of them must be intended for that End, and must not only be suited to the Circumstances that called for them, but also suited to the Nature of rational Creatures; and therefore, as all the things taught in them must be intelligible, and all things enjoined be practicable, so they must, by being known and practised, naturally contribute to the End of the Revelation of them.

And therefore, tho' Natural and Reveal'd Religion agree in the same general End of all rational Creatures, and in procuring that End by the same Means, consider'd as rational Creatures only, yet they plainly differ in other respects, not only in the Manner, but in the Matter of them; all Reveal'd Religion, as such, being only intended to impart such Helps to Mankind as in a pure Natural State they could have no Occasion for; and in this consists the Essence of Reveal'd Religion; and nothing is pure Reveal'd Religion but this, considered in Contradistinction to what is Natural.

This

This I think, Sir, is as clear as the Sun; and when I reflect upon it, I can't but wonder how it could come into your Head to imagine that two Things altogether different should be the same.

A. Not so fast, my good Friend; have but a little patience to examine my Reasons, and you'll see how it came into my Head, and how it ought to come into your own.

Give me leave to ask you two or three Questions; Don't you think, that God gave Mankind from the beginning some Law or Rule of their Conduct, and was not the Observation of that Rule sufficient to make them acceptable to God; and what could any extraordinary Revelation do more, than make men acceptable to God?

B. No Revelation pretends to do more than make Men acceptable to God, but all Revelation pretends in some respect or other to do more towards this than Natural Religion does; and therefore they cannot be the same.

A. This is very strange: If Mankind have had a Law or Rule from the Beginning, which was taught by Natural Religion, and by observing that Rule would

would be acceptable to God, what can Revelation do more towards our Acceptance with God, than Natural Religion has done?

If this has taught all that is sufficient for our Acceptance, can Revelation do more than all?

B. Do but consider your own Argument, and it will furnish you with an Answer: You say that Natural Religion has taught us a Law, which if it be observed will be sufficient for our Acceptance; but will the bare Knowledge of the Law hinder Mankind from breaking it? and will the Law be sufficient for our Acceptance, tho' we do not observe it?

I'm sure you will not say this: And if Men do not observe this Law, the longer they continue in Disobedience, the farther they will be from being accepted: They may become hardened in their Wickedness, and shut their Eyes against the Light, and give themselves up to their Appetites and Passions: They may be so estranged from God and Goodness, as to turn their Backs as it were upon them, and scorn all things serious and sacred.

And

And if this should happen, what will it signify that we have a Law? and yet this is all that Natural Religion teaches, as the means of our Acceptance with God; and since it is selfevident, that in a natural Way the End cannot be attained without the Means, it must follow, that where the Law, which is the natural Means of our Acceptance, is not observed, we cannot be accepted in a natural Way; and if we be accepted, it must be out of the natural Course of things, and that is in a Way præternatural.

Now Revelation is to teach us this Way. It does not pretend to teach any other Method of being accepted by God, as Rational Creatures, than that which Natural Religion teaches: It gives us the same Rule of Life, which that does; but you allow, that our Acceptance depends on the Observation of it, and in the Nature of things it is impossible to attain our natural End, and therefore be accepted without it: And since 'tis evident to all that this Rule was not observed, but that the whole World became abominably wicked, the Goodness of God out of his Love to Mankind, as a tender Father, has thought fit to give them a

Revelation to bring them to the Observation of it, by such Means, and Motives, as could not have been known any other Way, at least considering the Circumstances they had unhappily brought themselves into:

And if it has taught us this, it has visibly done more than Natural Religion, and therefore is not the same, but altogether different from it.

And from hence you see an Answer to what you urge in other parts of your Book, that where the End is the same, the Means and Precepts must be the same:

For supposing this true, as in one sense it is, 'tis evident that this can be no Objection to Revelation, as prescribing things different from Natural Religion; because it is apparent that their End is different; that is, the immediate and proximate End, which is what you must mean in your Assertion, or else it cannot be true.

Now the immediate, proximate and direct Intention of all the Precepts of Natural Religion is the End or Happiness of Man for which those Precepts are injoin'd, as a necessary Means in the Nature of Things:

But

But the immediate, proximate and direct Intention of Revelation, and all things in it, is to bring Men to the Observation of those natural Precepts: And the matter of it is not consider'd as in its own Nature essentially necessary to the End of Man, but the Observation of those Precepts only; and it is not intended as a Means to that End, but only accidentally, as those Natural Precepts are so; and it is therefore but an indirect and subordinate Means to it.

And as you and all the World allow, that the subordinate Means to an End may be many, and different, according as Circumstances of things are different; so you must allow, that there may be as many different Revelations, and as many different Precepts in different Revelations, as the different Circumstances of Mankind may at different Times, and in different Places require.

And as Natural Religion confiders Mankind as Rational Creatures only, so and so related to God, and one another, and as such providing suitable Laws for them, and suitable Means for the Knowledge of those Laws, according to the Circumstances they were made in: So

Revelation considers them, as in different Circumstances, and provides only such things for them as are suitable to those Circumstances; which, as they may be different at different times, and in different places, so they may and ought to be differently provided for:

And therefore, as the very End and Reason of Natural and Reveal'd Religion is different, they cannot, with any Reason, be said to be the same, however they may agree in a particular Respect, as it is known and allowed they do.

A. I will not interrupt the regular Examination of this Chapter we are now upon, by giving an Answer to what you have now said, because it is consider'd in another Place; but I think it more proper to proceed to the next Argument as it lies, and I will put it in the best Light I can.

I suppose you will not deny, that Natural Religion is from God, and if so, I beg leave to ask you this Question, as you here find it in the Book, was it perfect or imperfect?

B. Not imperfect, no doubt; but 'twas Weakness in me to say, as I did before,

that

that it was absolutely perfect, and I will give my Reason for it by and by : But if you please go on with your Argument.

A. I say then, that That Religion that comes from God must be absolutely perfect, as coming from an absolutely perfect Being ; Natural Religion you allow to come from God, and therefore this Religion must be absolutely perfect : and if absolutely perfect, it must be unchangeable, as the Author of it, and therefore incapable of Addition or Diminution.

And if it be incapable of Addition or Diminution, Revelation can be no more nor less than this Religion is, and therefore must be the very same.

Can there be any thing more demonstrative than this ?

B. I wonder to hear you talk at this rate, when there is nothing can be more weak and false ; you lay a great Stress upon it in other Places of your Book, but I'll shew you with how little Reason presently.

The whole Force of the Argument turns upon this mistaken Notion, That what comes from God must be absolutely perfect, because God himself is so. But
by

by the same Reason you might have said, that all his Creatures are absolutely perfect, and by consequence as much Gods as he, because they all come from him.

A. But you see I speak only of Religion.

B. 'Tis true, but you cannot reasonably confine it to that alone. For the Reason is the same, and equally concludes for the absolute Perfection of every thing else, as well as Religion, if its coming from an absolutely perfect Being is sufficient for it.

But to consider it, as relating to Religion only, if this must be absolutely perfect, and therefore incapable of Addition, or Diminution, then every thing of the same Nature, that is absolutely necessary to Religion, that comes from God, must be absolutely perfect: And as the Means of knowing it are as necessary as the Religion itself, will it not hence follow, that the Means of Knowledge, that God has given us, must be absolutely perfect? And as the Nature of Man must be so adapted to those Means of Knowledge, as to be perfectly capable of gaining all necessary Knowledge

ledge by the use of them, this also, as it comes from God, must be absolutely perfect.

And if this be all true, see what Consequences you will be obliged to maintain.

First you must allow, that since the Natures and Relations of Things are the Means of Knowledge that God has given us, they must be absolutely perfect, and therefore that it will be impossible to make any thing plainer, or teach any thing fuller, than they are taught in this Way; which, though I think it is elsewhere positively asserted by you, is evidently contrary to common Sense and Experience.

Secondly, Since the Use of our Reason is another Means of Knowledge, you must allow, that this also was absolutely perfect, and therefore that the Reason of Man was as perfect as the Reason of God, and if his Capacity of knowing, that he received from God, was incapable of Addition or Diminution, does it not plainly follow, that Mankind must be all equally capable of Knowledge at all times, and that no one can, at any time, have a greater, or less Capacity than

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another, and is not this apparently false, and can there be a greater Absurdity?

The true State of the Case I conceive to be this :

Whatever comes from God must be perfect, but absolute Perfection can belong only to God :

Perfection is an ambiguous Word, and what is perfect in one Respect, may be imperfect in another. There are different Orders of Creatures, that we know; some higher, and more excellent, and endued with a higher, and more excellent Degree of Being, than others that are below them ; in Respect of which, the inferior Orders may be said to be imperfect, in comparison of those above them, and yet each may be said to be perfect in his Kind, and Order, as having all those Powers and Properties, which the End, they were made for, requires for the Attainment of it, and that too in the utmost Perfection and Degree, that the Nature of that End requires.

And in this comparative and relative Sense of the word Perfection, which is the only Sense, in which it can be spoken of any thing that is not God, all things

may

may be said to be perfect, as they are so perfectly suited to their Ends, as to be defective in nothing either in Nature or Degree, which is necessary for the Attainment of it; and in this Sense all things must be perfect, when they come from God.

And if we apply this to Man, when he came out of his Maker's Hands, he must have been a perfect Man, endued with all the Powers and Properties of human Nature, and in such Degree and Perfection as was necessary to the End he was made for; and if we apply it to Religion, which has a necessary Relation to Man, that Religion which God gave him when he was made, and in his perfect State, must have been a perfect Religion; that is, a Religion perfectly adapted to the End he was made for, so as to want nothing in that State to the Atrainment of it.

And as the End he was made for could not be attained without some Rule of his Conduct, that Rule must have been a perfect Rule; and as that End and Rule would have been in vain, unless they were known, he must have been perfectly capable of knowing them, and

E furnish'd

furnish'd with all necessary Means of Knowledge, so as to need nothing more than the Means he had to the perfect Knowledge of them, and in the due Use of those Means could not fail of this Knowledge, and by acting according to this Knowledge, and his Rule, must attain the End he was made for: This I take to be the true Notion of Perfection; and if when you speak of the absolute Perfection of Religion, you mean no more by it but this, 'tis a very improper way of expressing your self, and I can't see how it serves your Purpose, which was to shew that Natural and Reveal'd Religion is the same.

A. I will soon shew you this, as plain as possible; for I'll take all that you have said into Natural Religion, and if Revelation can teach us nothing else but this, it must be the same; and yet I believe you will not deny that it can teach us nothing else but this. Does Revelation pretend to direct Man to any other End, or does it direct us to any other Means of attaining that End, than Natural Religion teaches? Are not the Duties required of every Man by Revelation, the same that are taught us by Natural

Natural Religion? and are they not therefore the same?

B. I allow they are the same in this respect: Revelation has doubtless the same ultimate End in view that Natural Religion has; but I have shewn before, that the immediate End of Revelation is not the same. As Man is a rational Creature, having a natural Relation to God, and his Creatures, he must always be obliged to act according to those Relations, so long as he is rational, and Revelation does not pretend to teach us otherwise; and I do allow, that had Mankind continued in that pure and perfect State they were made in, they had wanted nothing more to the Attainment of their End, than that State would have perfectly furnish'd them withal; that is, they would have wanted no other Rule of Life, nor any other Means of Knowledge, than those that were given them at the Beginning, as being each perfect in their kind, each perfectly suited to the End they were given for.

But does it follow from thence, that if Mankind should fall from this pure and perfect State, he could stand in need

of nothing more than he had in that State? His Nature as a rational Creature, and his Relation to God and his Creatures will be always the same; but his Purity and Perfection was not immutable, and tho' he was furnish'd with all Means of Knowledge of every thing necessary in the due Exercise of his Reason, yet he might neglect to exercise his Reason, and act contrary to it; and this Mankind actually did, and brought themselves into such a different State from that they were made in, that they could not obtain their End without some Means to help them out of it; and this is that which Revelation is to supply them with. And this is a different End from Natural Religion. Revelation does not teach Men any other Rule of Life, than their Nature, as rational Creatures, requires, but provides them such things as their imperfect and depraved Condition called for, to enable them to walk according to this Rule; and all those Helps that it has given for this Purpose are the proper Matter of Revelation. And as Revelation differs in this respect from Natural Religion, they are not entirely the same. In one Word, Sir, you must

must either say that Mankind could not fall from their Perfection and Purity, or else that they might want something more for the Attainment of their End, than Natural Religion could furnish them withal.

For if they could fall from their Perfection and Purity, as it appears they could by woful Experience, and if they have been in such a Condition as to have their natural Faculties impair'd, their Powers weakned, their Understandings darkned, and their Hearts so indisposed to, and alienated from God and their Duty, that they either could not know their Duty, or would not attend to, or consider the Means of knowing it, or that they could not, or would not walk according to what they knew; if the World was in such a Condition, I say, as this, this was a Condition altogether unsuitable to the End of Man, and 'twas in the Nature of Things impossible to attain that End while they continued in it; and by consequence, that which must bring Mankind to the End they were made for, considering this Condition must be something that would help him out of it, that is, something to enlighten

enlighten their Understandings, and strengthen their Powers, and work proper Dispositions, and Affections in them, and bring them back to such a Sense of their unhappy Condition, and the sad Consequences of it, as to engage them heartily to set about their Duty, and live like Rational Creatures, and to help them forward in this Work.

And this was the Business of Christianity, and something of this Nature must be the Business of all Revelations in the World.

So that all that your Arguments have hitherto proved, is only that Natural and Reveal'd Religion agree in the same Law, as the Rule of Rational Creatures, in order to the End they were made for.

And if you had only said, that they are the same in this respect, you had said nothing more than all the World know and say:

But because they agree, and are the same in this respect, to say that they are therefore the same in all respects, is to say what you know is false, and what I have sufficiently shewn to be so.

Perhaps

A. Perhaps you'll change your Mind when you see further: I have something more to say upon this Head which you'll find a little forward, but will very properly fall in here.

I suppose you don't deny but that God was always willing that all Men should come to the Knowledge of the Truth, and by Consequence of true Religion: And if so, this will certainly prove, that Natural Religion and Christianity must be the same.

For don't you allow, that Christianity is the one true and perfect Religion that God designed for all Mankind from the Beginning? and does it not thence follow, that it has existed from the Beginning, and therefore must be the same with Natural Religion?

B. You might as well have said, That because God designed the Christian Religion from Eternity, therefore it has existed from Eternity; and because He from Eternity designed Jesus Christ should be born of a Virgin in the fulness of time, therefore he was born from Eternity.

I suppose this will need no other Answer.

A. But

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A. But give me leave to add one Consideration more to confirm what I have here said :

Was there ever a time when God intended Mankind should have no Religion, or such an imperfect one as would not answer the End of its Institution? and if so, does not this imply, that there was but one true Religion from the Beginning? And if Christianity is the one true Religion which God designed for Mankind from the Beginning, it seems, to my bewilder'd Reason, to imply, that it must have existed from the Beginning, and be as old as the Creation; and if so, how can it differ from Natural Religion, but only in Name, whilst the Nature of them both are intirely the same? For all allow, that the Natural was the Religion of Mankind at the Creation.

B. I am sorry to find a Man of your Sense treating a Subject of so important a Nature, in so loose and sophistical a manner. When such Arguings as these are wanting in common Chat, they do well enough in the Way of Diversion, and they are allowed among the Students in the University to teach them the Art of Syllogism.

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But they are always below a serious Disputant, that aims at Truth and Clearness ; and I'm sorry to see such Things in Print, because they lessen their Character; and they who are Strangers to you must believe, that you are either a weak or an ill Man, and that you either know no better, or else intend to deceive the ignorant and unwary Reader. 'Tis impossible for you, one would think, not to see the Fallacy of all this.

A. If the Fallacy be so plain, 'tis the more easily answered, and I desire you'll shew your Skill upon it.

Is it not true that Mankind had from the Beginning some Religion, and was not that Religion the only true one?

B. Yes, but it will by no Means follow, that because that was the only true Religion then, it must therefore be always so, and that there never could be any other true Religion, but this, at any other time.

A. Can there be more true Religions than one ?

B. Yes, undoubtedly there may : Religion is a variable thing, and if it be considered only as a Means to an End, as 'tis evident you all along do consider

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it, as there may be different Means required to the same End, according to different Circumstances, so the different Circumstances of Mankind may occasion different Religions; because, according to those different Circumstances, more things may be necessary at one time or place than another to attain the End of Mankind.

And though it be always necessary to a Rational Creature as such, that he always live by the same Rule: Yet if he does not live by that Rule, whether through Accident or willful Ignorance, or through Carelessness or presumptuous Disobedience, or whatever the Cause may be, This, and other Things that may follow from it, may require some further Means to bring him to his Duty, and thereby to the End his Duty is required for.

And therefore that which teaches us those Means must be the only true Religion in this Case.

So that though Natural Religion was, and is, and always will be, as I have said, the only true Religion of Rational Creatures, consider'd barely as acting according to their Rational Nature, directed

rected by the Natures and Reasons of things : Yet when they are considered as not acting according to their Rational Nature, and by that Irregularity are fallen into such different Circumstances, as call for further Assistance, that is the only true Religion for Men in those Circumstances, which provides them with such Means as the Nature of those Circumstances require.

And since you do allow by your own Argument, that the Goodness of God is always willing, that Mankind should come to the Knowledge of the Truth, and must therefore be willing at all times to make known those necessary Means to us as we have occasion for them : So we may conclude, from the Goodness of God, and the Necessities of Man, that there may have been many Revelations of this Kind, according as there have been different Reasons for them at different times, and that too many more, than we have yet come to the Knowledge of.

And therefore to talk as you do, but of one true Religion, which God designed for all the World from the Beginning, is

to suppose that all the World must be always in the same Condition that Mankind were in at the Beginning.

But this you see now they are not; and you cannot deny but a Difference in Circumstances may be a good Reason for different Dispensations; and if so, you must allow, that there may have been as many different Dispensations of Providence towards Mankind, even in the way of Revelation, as there have been different Reasons for them: And in this respect they may be said to be so many different Religions, and yet every one true in its Time and Place.

A This is a strange way of talking in my Opinion.

~~I~~ I always took it for a certain Maxim, that there can be but one true Religion; whereas according to your odd way of Reasoning, there may be many true Religions at the same time.

For as Religion is, as you say, only a Means to an End, and as the Circumstances of different People may want such Assistance as others do not, so God may make known to one People what he does not to another, because they have

have no occasion for it: And as the things that in this Case he teaches one People, are no Part of the Religion of the other, to whom they are not made known, there may be several true Religions at a time: And is not this a strange Doctrine?

B. I believe it is no more strange than true: This was the very Case of the Jews, with relation to other Nations: They had a Revelation of what God required of them, as necessary to the Circumstances they were in, and the Ends he had to serve by them; and this related only to them, and no others: and if all the rest of the World were under the Conduct of Natural Religion, they were so far in the true Religion; and if they had no other Revelation vouchsafed to them, this was the only Rule they had to walk by, and the only true Religion to them, considered barely as Natural Religion, without regard to its Corruptions.

The same thing may be said with the same Reason of all other Parts of the World, in relation to Christianity.

As there are many Parts of the World where Christianity is not known, Christianity

tianity is nothing to them : It is to them as if there were no such thing ; they must be govern'd by what they know.

And therefore, tho' Christianity is the only true Religion to us, and ought to be so to all to whom it is reveal'd, and will be so to all that impartially consider it, and desire to do the Will of God; yet Natural Religion and Judaism must be respectively the only true Religion to them who never heard of any other.

So that you see from hence, that there is no Necessity to suppose, as you do, that there must be but one true Religion for all the World : On the contrary, it appears that there may be different Religions allowed by God at different Times, nay different Religions among different People at the same time ; and that therefore it does by no means follow, that because Christianity is the only true Religion now, to those to whom it is made known, it must have been the same that Mankind haye had at the Creation, to whom it was never made known, and for whom it was not intended, as having then no occasion for it, when they are supposed to be in a State of Perfection.

So that your Argument is drawn from a false Supposition ; but this is not the only Fault of it : You have likewise a false Notion of Christianity, as you conceive it to be only a Republication of the Natural Law.

But this it is not, as shall be shewn by and by ; and if it were nothing else, and in this respect might be said to be the same that Natural Religion is, yet 'tis absurd to say as you do, that Christianity is as old as the Creation, because it was not Christianity till it was republish'd by Christ.

In its own Nature it had no Relation to Christ ; 'twas his Republication of it that made it Christian : and as this was not done till many Ages after the Creation, 'tis Nonsense to say that Christianity exifted from the Creation. And tho' the Matter of this Religion exifted at the Creation, yet it was not as the Christian, but as Natural Religion only.

But after all, Christianity is not a Republication of the Religion of Nature only, but it is, as I said, a great deal more than this ; it is a System of Doctrines, Precepts and Promises, many of which were unknown, till reveal'd by Christ,

Christ. All the Doctrines and Laws that Nature teaches are indeed revived by him, but then they are only a Part of what he taught, and 'tis absurd to call a Part the Whole: and therefore to say that Christianity existed from the Creation, because a Part of it did so, is only to say, that what you absurdly call Christianity, and mistake for it, existed from the Creation.

Thus I think I have given you a full Answer to your Arguments, which appear to me to have nothing of Truth in them, but to be all weak, unconcluding and fallacious: Let us now consider what is behind, and whether there be more Strength in what remains: And that I may not mistake, and so misrepresent what you say, be pleased to state your own Argument: and I am the more desirous of this, because I think as it stands in Print you express your self with great Ambiguity.

A. Well, Sir, I'll endeavour to be as plain as possible; and however we disagree in some respects, I find we are one in these Propositions, That Mankind had some Religion from the Beginning! And that they had a Law or Rule of

Life sufficient for the End they were made for.

And I suppose you will not deny that they had sufficient Means of knowing it.

The very Nature of a Law requires this, for a Law that is unintelligible ceases to be a Law.

And if you consider the Goodness of God, that he was at all times willing that Men should come to the Knowledge of the Truth ; could not his infinite Wisdom and Power at all times find sufficient Means for making Mankind capable of knowing, what his infinite Goodness designed they should know ?

B. What were those Means of Knowledge you speak of ?

A. Nothing but the Use of our rational Faculty, by which we are distinguish'd from Brutes.

For as the Eye is Judge of things visible, and the Ear of things audible, so is Reason of things reasonable.

And as God has given us no other Faculty to judge of such things by, but this, this will be sufficient for the End it was intended for ; that is, it will make us capable of knowing at all times, whatever God requires we should know.

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B. Re-

B. Remember then, Sir, to prevent all further Ambiguity, that this is your Sense of sufficient Means of Knowledge; and when you say that the due Use of our Reason is this Means, you must understand that God has given Mankind sufficient Power, by the Use and Exercise of their Reason, at all times to come to the Knowledge of every thing that God requires they should know.

And so it was no doubt in the Beginning, and it would have been always so, had they always continued in the same Perfection as at first. As they would all be equally capable, so all that should duly exercise their Capacity, would doubtless be equal in Knowledge: And as the Religion of rational Creatures, as such, is but one, so all would have had but one Religion.

And therefore I own it was a silly and injudicious Objection I made, of Peoples *willing Contrarieties*.

But this only arose from a Confusion of Ideas, and not rightly distinguishing what it was we were speaking of, viz. That Mankind were only considered in our Argument in the State in which they were first made, and in my Objection

tion I considered them in that dark and blundering Condition that we are now in.

This Confusion, I observe, ran thro' all we said, and 'tis no Wonder, that in this Case we both of us talk'd confusedly and intricately, and sometimes ridiculously.

But now, Sir, I am willing to prevent that Inconsistency, and as your Argument runs all upon what we were at the Beginning, and not what we are now, in this Case I plainly see there could be no Contrariety of Opinion or Will, but their Knowledge would have been equal, and their Religion one, and all would have equally attain'd their End.

And herein consists the Sufficiency of Reason ; and if it be equally sufficient for our Knowledge of all things necessary at all times, as you assert, it will be sufficient to teach us the same Knowledge at all Times, and to all Persons equally alike, to this Day : And yet in fact it does not, and cannot do this, and therefore whatever it was at first, it is not a sufficient Means of Knowledge now, according to your own Notion of it.

A. Though all are not equal in Knowledge, yet all may have sufficient Knowledge for their Circumstances, if they use their Reason in the best manner they are able.

B. You don't consider here, that this Assertion of yours contradicts your whole Argument, and defeats the Design of your whole Book. Your Intention is to shew the Sufficiency of Natural Religion, and the Necessity of the same Natural Means at all times to the same Natural End, and the Sufficiency of Reason to discover and apply these Means; And now you say that though a Man does not know all that God requires to be known, yet he may have Knowledge sufficient for his Circumstances; which plainly intimates, that the Natural Means of attaining the Natural End of Man are not so necessary, fixt and immutable, but that there may be a different Way of coming at our End, according as our Circumstances are different, and that those Means which God designed we should know, in order to our End, are not always necessary, but in such and such Circumstances. This is very strange:

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But setting aside this, what is it that you mean by saying, that when Men are ignorant of what God designed they should know, they may have sufficient Knowledge for their Circumstances?

A. I mean, that when Men endeavour to get what Knowledge they can, by using their Reason in the best manner they are able, this will justify their Conduct, and they will be accepted by God.

Now here again you don't consider, that you are giving up your Cause, and whereas you was before shewing the Necessity of a Law, and of the Knowledge of that Law, and of all that God requires to be known and done in order to the End of Man ; you now go away from all this to the Goodness of God, that will accept us, tho' we do not know all that he requires us to know, and by Consequence don't do what He in the Natures of things requires us to do, if we do but sincerely use our best Endeavours.

'Tis your professed Opinion that for God to do any thing, but what the immutable Natures and Relations of things direct, is, to act arbitrarily, and yet you don't scruple, in contradiction to this, to

assert, that God may accept Mankind, without those Means that in the Nature of things are necessary.

And if by his Acceptance we may attain our End, without the necessary natural Means, is it not plain, by your own Confession, that there is another way of coming at our End, than Natural Religion teaches us in the Natures and Relations of things?

This is the Objection I hinted at on our first setting out in this Dispute, about Sincerity being available for our Acceptance. And you cannot but see how directly opposite it is to your Notion of the Immutability of the Divine Will :

For if God be, as you say, immutably determin'd in his Operations by the Natures and Relations of things, is there not a necessary Relation between necessary Means and their End? and is it possible to conceive that he can give us the End without the Means that are absolutely necessary in the Nature of things, merely by his Will alone?

Whilst we consider God, as acting differently upon different Reasons according to the Difference of Circumstances,

ces, and not expecting the same things from a perfect and imperfect Creature alike; nor more of an imperfect Creature than the Nature of his Condition, and the Measure of his Imperfection will admit of, this opens a Door to all such Instances of Goodness, as his Wisdom shall direct him to:

But to hope for Acceptance only on our Sincerity, and at the same time to speak of God as immutably determin'd by the Natures and Relations of things without regard to Circumstances, as I apprehend you all along do, is to hope against an absolute Impossibility in Nature, according to your Way of thinking.

Beside, Sir, what is it you mean by saying, that if we use our Reason in the best manner we are able, this will justify our Conduct?

You are not here enquiring what will justify your Conduct, but what Means God has provided for our Knowledge of what he designed we should know: And if it be true, that the right Use of our Reason is the natural and only Means of Knowledge that God has provided for us, and if this will answer the End it was provided for, it must naturally bring us

us to all necessary Knowledge, because this is the End it was given for.

This Faculty was not given us to justify our Conduct but direct it: And tho' it be true in a State of Nature, that if we conduct our selves according to the Dictates of right Reason, this will recommend us to the Favour of God, because we shall thereby answer the End of our Creation, yet the Favour of God has nothing to do in this Place, where we are only speaking of the natural Means of Knowledge; nor indeed is the Favour of God annex'd to the bare use of the Means of Knowledge, but to a regular Observation of, and a due Obedience to what we know.

In one Word, the natural Means of Knowledge are not sufficient for their End, unless they will naturally teach us all Knowledge at all times, and they can never be said to be sufficient for our Circumstances, unless they teach us all the Knowledge that our Circumstances require in all the different Changes we are liable to: And,

If the same Rule be always equally necessary to all Men, as Rational Creatures, it was always and always will be necef-

sary, that it should be equally known by all, and by consequence there was always and always will be a Necessity, that all should be equally capable of knowing it at all times.

And if the whole Rule was necessary to our Acceptance with God, if any one be ignorant of any part of it, he is ignorant of something necessary to his Acceptance, and by consequence he has not a sufficient Knowledge for his Acceptance, let his Circumstances be what they will.

And if he be accepted in such a Case, it is not on the Account of the Sufficiency of his Knowledge, which is evidently insufficient; but from the Goodness of God to him, notwithstanding that Insufficiency.

Besides, you say the natural Means of Knowledge is our Reason, and if this be sufficient for its End, if it be applied in a due manner, and duly attended to, it will naturally teach us all things necessary: And if all Men were made by God equally reasonable, and therefore equally capable of Knowledge by their Reason; it is natural to conclude, as I said before, that all must be equal in Knowledge.

And yet it is plain that in Fact it is not so, and if Men, notwithstanding the Sufficiency of their Reason for the Discovery of all necessary Knowledge, may, nevertheless

be ignorant of what is necessary to be known, 'tis plain that they never can attain their End by the Sufficiency of their Reason only, as being ignorant of something necessary to it.

And if it be possible for Mankind in such a State of Ignorance to attain the End they were made for, it must be either by the mere Goodness of God to give them the End without the Means, in contradiction to the Natural Order, and Relation of things:

Or else, by proposing some rational Method to them, to draw them out of their ignorant, irrational and unnatural State, and according to the settled Order of Nature to bring them to their End by suitable Means:

Whether of these is most reasonable I leave every one to judge, who knows any thing of the Nature of God, who as he is a perfectly reasonable Being, so he must be supposed to govern all things according to their Natures and Relations. -

And as he governs natural Things in a natural Way, and rational Creatures in a rational Way, so we must conceive, that Mankind being intelligent, and free Creatures, he will deal with them suitably to their intelligent and free Nature, and by consequence where their Circumstances call for his Assistance, that he will give them such proper

proper Information to enlighten and direct their Understandings, and such proper Motives to influence their Wills, as are suitable to the Nature and Necessity of their Circumstances.

And so far as this is necessary, and yet cannot be done in a natural Way, we may conclude, he will do it in a supernatural.

A. Have you not being reasoning all this while against your self? for did not you but just before allow, that God did provide Mankind a sufficient Means of knowing his Will from the Beginning, by giving him this Faculty of Reason, and here you have been representing it as capable of nothing?

B. No, Sir, you quite mistake my Meaning: I do not derogate from Reason, nor do I deny the Sufficiency of it to the End it was intended for at the Beginning, and in that State Mankind were made in.

No, on the contrary I have shewn you, that had they continued always the same, and in the same perfect State they were then in, Reason would have taught them all Things necessary, and we had needed no other Aid but this, provided we should make a proper Use of it.

But then, as this is all spoken on the necessary Supposition of the Perfection of our Rational Faculty, and our due and proper

Exercise of it, in the Consideration of its proper Objects, the Natures and Relations of Things, if it should so happen, that our Reasoning Faculty should be impair'd, or that we do not use, and apply it, as we ought, then our Reason may be so far from being sufficient for us, that it may stand us in very little Stead.

To illustrate this by your own Instance: The Eye, you say, is Judge of all things visible; and yet this is only on certain Suppositions, that the Optick Nerve be sound and right, that the Medium be not too thick, nor the Distance too great; and if any of these Requisites be wanting, we shall see but very imperfectly, if at all, and our Eye will not be a sufficient Guide to us, even in such things as it is otherwise a Judge of.

And so it is in the Case before us: Tho' our Reason be a sufficient Judge of Things reasonable, yet it is only on Supposition of all things necessary to a reasonable Judgment.

But if our Faculty be impair'd, or we will not, or cannot, or do not use it as we ought, we may be as much in Darkness and Ignorance, even as to necessary things, as if we had no such Faculty, and we shall want some other Means to help us out of it: And if the Knowledge of necessary things be necessary, our natural Faculty, 'tis plain, in this case, will not be

be sufficient, but we shall want another Guide to direct us to it, And this Guide again is Revelation.

So that you see how naturally you are led to Revelation, diversify your Argument as you please; and it gives me a Pleasure so often to remind you of it.

And you see likewise, the End and Reason of Revelation is not, as you have already said, to introduce any new Religion for the World, considered as rational Creatures: As such, Religion must be always the same; as their Nature and End and Condition are the same, the Means of obtaining this End must be the same.

And as Reason is the Guide of a rational Agent, perfect Reason will be always a perfect Guide: But if our Nature and Condition happen to be altered, and our Reason become imperfect, Revelation then comes in as a Remedy to this Disease, and a Help to our Imperfection: and according to the Nature of the Imperfection, which is the Reason of the Revelation, such must the Nature of the Revelation be.

Thus for instance, if Mankind should happen to become ignorant, however that Ignorance came about of those natural Notions and natural Laws, the Knowledge of which is necessary to the End of Man, a Revelation in this

this Case must revive their Knowledge of these things, by giving a new Edition of them.

And if they happen to become so weak or wicked, that they either could not or would not consider things, or live according to the Knowledge they had, a Revelation in this Case must give them proper Motives to bring them to Consideration, and proper Encouragements to bring them to Obedience.

And as the Condition of Mankind is such that their Faith is apt to fail, and their Hope to waver, and they are always too prone to forget their Duty, and the Motives and Encouragements to it, and to lose their good Dispositions, Desires and Resolutions, thro' the Corruption of our Nature, or the Pleasures and Busines of the World, and the like, a Revelation in this Case must provide proper Means and Assistances for this, to keep up a Sense of our Duty, and the Motives and Encouragements to it, to beget and preserve good Dispositions, Desires and Resolutions in us, to enliven and strengthen our Faith and Hope, and guard us against ourselves and the World.

And as this was the Condition of the World when our Saviour came into it, so this was the Design, and this the Reason of the Christian Revelation; and you see it is adapted

to the different Natures and Relations of things, as they are mutable or immutable.

Where things are immutable, it provides accordingly; rational Creatures, considered as rational only, are taught the same Law and Rule of Life that must be always the Rule of all rational Creatures, a reasonable Nature, as such, being always the same.

But as Men are not always the same, but their Faculties, and Conditions and Circumstances are mutable, they are here dealt with mutably, and suitable Provision is here made for them, according to the Change they have undergone.

And tho' it is, in respect of some of its Doctrines and Precepts, the same that Natural Religion was, and in respect of them it may be said to be as old as the Creation, yet since there was a Necessity of a Republication of them, with such other Helps as Mankind stood in need of at that time, and will do to the End of the World, considering the Corruption they are fallen into, as Christianity was intended to provide for these Necessities, and was naturally adapted to them, so it is as much founded in the Natures and Relations of things as Natural Religion is, as being a necessary Means adapted to a necessary End, arising from the mutable Condition of the World.

And should any one say, as you hereafter do, that God cannot appoint any positive Institutions, because they have no natural Goodness in them, tho' they have a natural and necessary Relation to a necessary End, that the Nature of Man requires to be provided for, this would be the same as to say, that God cannot act mutably for mutable Reasons, but must always be obliged to act the same Way, and do the same Things, let the Natures, and Relations, and Reasons of Things be what they will.

And this I suppose you will not say, if you believe God to be a perfectly reasonable Being, as being the greatest Absurdity in the World.

And now, when we consider all this together, I think you have an Answer to this whole Chapter, and indeed the main Argument of the whole Book.

And what is all your Reasoning come to? and that which I was so weak as to call a New Hypothesis, what does it prove? but only this, That there is such a thing as a Law of Nature, which was appointed by God at the Creation, for all Mankind to live by, as a necessary Means in the Nature of Things, to bring them to the End they were made for; and that as this Law was republish'd by Jesus Christ, so the Religion of Christ and that

that of Nature are in this respect the same : That as they had a Law appointed from the Creation, so they had sufficient Means of knowing it by the due Use of their Reason.

And all this is very true, and 'tis very certain, that had the World always made a due Use of their Reason, and lived up to the Law that God appointed them, they would infallibly have attained the End of their Creation, and therefore all other Revelation for this Purpose would have been needless.

But it does not thence follow, that because they had a Law sufficient for them, and sufficient Means for the Knowledge of it by their Reason, that they would certainly attain the End of their Creation, though they neither used their Reason, nor lived according to that Law, and that Revelation would in this case be needless. And therefore if this Argument be levelled against Christianity, it is altogether beside the Mark.

For the World is not considered by Christianity as wanting a sufficient Law or Rule of Life, but as not attending to it, and not living by it, and as labouring under great Mistakes about it ; nay, as sunk into the utmost Corruption of Manners, and wallowing in the very Sink of Debauchery.

They are not considered as having no Means of knowing the Will of God, but

as not using those Means in a due Manner, and as having thereby fallen into great Ignorance of many Things necessary to be known, which, considering the State they were fallen into, 'twas morally impossible they should know.

They are not considered as having no true Notions of God or Religion, but as having those Truths made ineffectual by a Mixture of abominable Errors, and overwhelmed with Superstition and Idolatry.

This was the View that the World was considered in, when Christianity appeared; and the Design of it was to deliver them out of this Condition.

And therefore the only Way to shew that Christianity was needless, is to shew that the World had never any Need of those things that it taught us, and prescribed for this Purpose.

It must be shewn, that the World had never any Need of a Republication of the Law of Nature, and of those Helps and Assistances contained in the Gospel, which are properly the Christian Part of it.

It must be shewn, that Mankind had always made a due Use of their Faculties, and had never fallen into Error; that they had never any false Notions of God and Religion, and that they never were over-run with

with Superstition and Idolatry, or at least not so as to need any other Help than their own Reason, for their Reformation.

It must be shewn, that their Faculties were always in the same Perfection they were in at the Creation, and that all Men were then equally capable of understanding, judging, and finding out the Duties and Obligations arising from the Natures and Relations of Things as they were at the Beginning: And

That they have never been corrupted, nor become abominably wicked, notwithstanding the Perfection of the Rule they had, and the Means God afforded them to know it by.

These things must be proved to over-turn Christianity: And if these things are not true, and therefore cannot be proved, then the next thing to be done must be

To shew, that Men in an ignorant, negligent, idolatrous, superstitious, corrupted, and abominably wicked State of Life, are equally capable of attaining their End, with those who are in their natural perfect and incorrupt State: And that it is unreasonable for God to desire to deliver them out of it, or afford them any other Means to help them out of it, than Reason alone would furnish them withal.

Let a Man proceed thus, and he does something: But to talk of the Sufficiency of Natural Religion to rational Creatures, if they will liye up to it and consider it; and thence to draw the Needlessness of Revelation is absurd.

Natural Religion is only sufficient for our End, on Supposition that we live up to it, and this plainly implies that if we do not live up to it, it will not be sufficient.

And since 'tis certain that the World did not live up to it, but became very ignorant, and very wicked, notwithstanding all that Natural Religion could do, 'twas this that called for further Revelation; and if we would judge fairly whether it was needless, or not, it must be compared with those Circumstances that were the Reason and Occasion of it, and it must be consider'd whether those Circumstances were a Reason sufficient for it.

This is the true State of the Question, and therefore all your future Arguments, relating to the Perfection of Natural Religion and its Sufficiency to the Perfection and Happiness of a Rational Nature, provided we will live up to it, are all nothing to the purpose, if you would set aside Revelation by it.

For we all know the Perfection and Sufficiency of Natural Religion in it self, that it wants nothing to answer the End of Man, considered barely as a Rational Creature; but as Man may want a great deal more than this, consider'd as an ignorant and wicked Creature, this is the Matter of Revelation.

And according to the Nature and Measure of this Ignorance and Corruption, which may be different at different Times, as there may be a Necessity for different Methods of Assistance, so this I said before begat different Revelations; all which were intended as a Remedy for our spiritual Diseases to draw us out of that irrational State we had fallen into, and bring us to a due Observance of that natural Law, which alone must, and always will be, the Law of a Rational Nature.

This is all that I think necessary to be observed in this Chapter, except a very remarkable Passage that I find in the eleventh Page, where in the Pursuit of your Argument that God has provided sufficient Means of knowing whatever he requires to be known; you at last ask me this Question, Whether there's not a clear, and distinct Light, that enlightens all Men, and which, the Moment that they attend to it, makes

them

them perceive those eternal Truths, which are the Foundation of all our Knowledge? And is it not God himself that immediately illuminates them? And what better Reason can you assign, why infinite Wisdom should act thus, except it be to give Mankind standing Rules to distinguish Truth from Falshood, especially in Matters of the highest Consequence, to their eternal, as well as temporal Happiness?

This is the Passage, and I profess I don't understand any thing at all of it: I do not understand what you mean by that clear and distinct Light, that enlightens all Men, and makes them perceive those eternal Truths, &c. I know of no such Light, and I am sure all Men do not perceive those Truths, and therefore all Men are not enlightened by it; but the Reason is, you'll say, that they don't attend to it, for the Moment they attend to it, it makes them perceive them: This Light, you say, is God Himself, who immediately illuminates all Men; and the Reason of his so doing, you say, is to give Mankind standing Rules to distinguish Truth from Falshood by.

I am not satisfied of the Truth of this, that God immediately illuminates all Mankind in the Knowledge of Eternal Truths, much less do I apprehend, that we should

not

not have sufficient standing Rules to distinguish Truth from Falshood by, without his immediate Illumination.

But whether this be true, or not, I shall not dispute at present; but I can't but say, it is a strange Assertion, when I consider it as coming from one, who has been endeavouring to prove that God has provided all Men with sufficient Means of Knowledge, of whatever is necessary to be known, in the Natures and Relations of Things: And that we need nothing more to give us this Knowledge, but to exercise our Rational Faculty in the Consideration of them: Nay, you say in another Place expressly, that this is the only Means of Knowledge that God has given us.

And now you say here, or seem to me to say, that we do not get our Knowledge by this, but by God's immediate Illumination; and the Light which enlightens us in the Discovery of Truth, is not what arises naturally from the Consideration of the Natures and Relations of things in a Natural Way, but it is a Light that is imparted immediately by God himself, and therefore in a Way supernatural.

One while we have sufficient Knowledge by our Reason, and neither need, nor have any other Means, but that: Now this is

not

not sufficient without divine Illumination; and we have no other Means of Knowledge of eternal Truths, but this.

One while you seem to prove, or aim to prove, that there was no New extraordinary Revelation, and now it seems by what you have here asserted, as if you thought, we could not come at any thing Rule of Knowledge without an immediate Illumination by God himself. I cannot distinguish from an extraordinary Revelation, let it be done in what Manner it will,

This, Sir, is a manifest Inconsistency in me; and what I can't account for: But perhaps it may arise from my not rightly apprehending your Meaning, tho' I think you are right. Words are capable of no other Meaning than that I have taken them in.

This will require your further Thought, and so I leave it with you to another Day; when, if you please, we will examine the remainder of your Argument contained in the following Chapters.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

PAge 9. line 12. for to be read is. p. 23. lin. 4. before altogether r. so. p. 39. lin. 1. before perhaps place p. 40. lin. 25. for wanting r. vented. p. 41. for the your. p. 44. lin. 16. before This place A. ib. lin. 18. do